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MSNBC 03/31/2020 01:04:28 PM: I'm wondering Mr. Secretary what you're hearing from the folks you just talked to and what services will they be able to provide in the Los Angeles area?

A/SN: Well the procedures here aren't any different than they are in New York. We're acting as a relief valve for the local hospitals to take on cases that they're getting crowded on to take on Covid-19 cases so the ship is here. It is coordinating well with the local authorities coming up with procedures and processes to bring people here. There are already nine current patients from the local communities two have already been discharged after receiving treatment on the ship. And just had an opportunity to talk to the crew. Unfortunately I did not go on the ship because they're practicing very good social distancing to ensure the ship stays clean, but I did get a chance to talk to them on the 1MC and thank them and congratulate them for getting the ship ready so quickly.

MSNBC: Our thanks to them as well. Are they fully stocked? Do they have the medical personnel and medical supplies that they need?

A/SN: They are fully stocked. They have a 1,000-bed hospital basically on the water and they are going to be adding a few more staff here so they can meet that full capacity. Right now I believe they can probably handle 750 to 800 people but they'll be staffing up to handle the full load if that's required.

MSNBC: Meantime, I want to ask you about a report that just came up on the San Francisco Chronicle that the captain of the "USS Theodore Roosevelt" which currently has dozens of infected Sailors on board is pleading with the Navy to send them more resources. Ships are tight quarters and he is basically saying, we need help. What can you tell us about that, and what are you going to do for all of the Sailors on board that ship?

A/SN: Well, we're very concerned about the "TR" right now. She's in Guam. She pulled into Guam last week when there were a couple of cases on the ship. And a couple more positive on the test. In an abundance of caution we brought the ship in. We're going through a methodical process to get Sailors off the ship, get them housed in sort of quarantine, semi-quarantine areas on the shore. But we still have to maintain a minimum level of manning on that ship because the ship contains a lot of things that are not like a cruise ship. It's got weapons onboard, it's got a nuclear power plant, so we're going through the process making sure we have a full crew that can man those things at a minimal level and going through the process of testing. We initially only have the ability to test about 200 people a day on the ship. That's increasing. And we're in constant communication with the CO and medical community on that ship and we're taking all the appropriate actions to make sure that we can keep the Sailors safe.

MSNBC: In the letter that he wrote, he said only a small number of Sailors had actually been off-boarded, and he said, we are not at war. Sailors do not need to die and so is this a question of mission readiness versus the health of some of those Sailors? How would you sort of categorize your plan of action right now?

A/SN: Well, you know, our mission is to defend the nation. And we can't defend the nation with Sailors who are sick. So our number one priority in that regard is to make sure our Sailors are safe and healthy

and they can man the ship. So I don't see a disconnect necessarily and he's correct, we're not at war. We agree with him on that. We're doing everything we can to ensure that the ship maintains a level of readiness that in case there is something that happens, it can be ready to go. It's really important that the country understands and that the world understands, our partners and allies and probably most importantly our adversaries and foes, the one who may be thinking about taking advantage of this situation to cause problems on the seas that the Navy is at sea and they're at work and they'll continue to be so. We will work our way through this crisis just as the nation is working through the crisis. The letter that was written that I just saw this morning, was written a couple of days ago, we already have a thousand people off the ship. We're working with the local authorities in Guam to get some hotel space opened up so that we can take more of them off. So it's an ongoing process and I am confident we'll get to the right answer on the "TR."

MSNBC: Do you have a sense of when you'll be able to do that? He asked that the folks be quickly isolated, understanding that you just saw this letter this morning. Do you have sort of a timeline?

A/SN: Well, I just -- before I came here over to the "Mercy" I had a conversation with the chief of naval operations, 7th fleet commander and PAC fleet commander. They are on this. I'm confident they're putting all the attention they can on this issue, and I'm certain that even as we speak, more and more Sailors are coming off the ship and being tested.

MSNBC: Our good thoughts are with all of those folks, and they certainly, our thanks to all the members of the Navy and those folks who are on board behind you who are going to be facing a different kind of war against coronavirus. Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly, we appreciate you taking the time to talk to us.

A/SN: thank you.